Rosselli details account of plot to kill Castro

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WASHINGTON (AP) — Underworld figure John Rosselli gave the Senate Intelligence Committee a detailed account Tuesday of his involvement in an alleged Central Intelligence Agency plot to kill Cuban Premier Fidel Castro, according to chairman Frank Church.

Rosselli's testimony "filled us in with much greater detail and a much more complete understanding of ... the chronology of events," Church said, adding that Rosselli's version did not differ from what already has appeared in news accounts.

However, Church indicated that Rosselli could provide no information on whether any orders to kill Castro originated outside the CIA. With one exception, Rosselli also refused to identify any non-government persons involved for fear it might endanger their lives, the Idaho Democrat said.

The one exception was Chicago rackets chief Sam Giancana, who was murdered last week and who also had been previously linked to the Castro plot, Church said. Vice chairman John Tower, R-Texas, called Giancana a "peripheral figure" in the plot, adding "our evidence leads us to believe Rosselli was not a peripheral figure."

In an arrangement worked out with the committee, Rosselli, 70, arrived and left by a back stairway in an effort to avoid reporters and photographrs. Church said the committee had made no deals with Rosselli "other than a reasonable accommodation for his own personal safety."

Rosselli, described by those who have met him as a dapper, soft-spoken gentleman, is fighting a government effort to deport him to his native Italy. One of the arguments advanced by Rosselli's attorneys has been that revelation of his CIA connection would make him liable to retaliation by members of Italy's large Communist party.

Sources have said that Rosselli was contacted in 1960 in connection with a plan to poison Castro. It remains unclear, however, whether any CIA-supported attempt actually was made on Castro's life.

Asked if Rosselli's account substantiated previous press reports of the plot, Church replied, "There was no refutation in his testimony." Church added: "I have stated previously, I will state it again, the committee has hard evidence that the CIA was involved in both assassination plots and assassination attempts."

A former member of the Al Capone gang, Rosselli has been questioned many times by police and government investigators over the years.

In the 1920s, police wanted to ask him about the shooting death of the key witness in a case in which Rosselli stood accused of selling morphine, but he jumped bail and disappeared. During the 1930s in Chicago he was arrested 16 times on suspicion of carrying a loaded weapon.

In the 1940s he served three years of a 10-year sentence on charges arising from an organized crime scheme to extort millions of dollars from Hollywood producers. In 1969 he was convicted and sentenced again, this time in connection with a card cheating scheme at a plush Los Angeles gambling club.

Two years ago he declined to answer questions from staff members of the Senate Watergate committee on grounds of national security.

On Monday, Church said that White House reluctance to relinquish those materials had forced the committee to postpone its questioning of some witnesses.